

Our ref: HA01/41/69 Pt2  
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16 September 2003

Dear Mr Djanogly

### **A14 THRAPSTON TO BRAMPTON - GRADE SEPARATED JUNCTIONS**

As promised in my letter of 28 August, I am now responding to your letter of 22 August about the current status of the Agency's published proposals for improvement of seven junctions along the length of A14 between Thrapston and Brampton.

I should, first of all like to extend my apologies to you, and to others, for the lack of direct, personal, notification of the revised status of this scheme. Letters were sent to a number of interested parties on 21 July 2003 but this was largely confined to local authorities who at that point in time had been in recent contact with the Agency's Project Delivery Team. The considerations that now confront us, as set out below, are currently the responsibility of this team and I will ensure that the remaining parties are advised as quickly as possible.

It is important for me to stress that the proposals, as published, have not been withdrawn. There has been a need to revise our thinking on the priority status of these improvements in the light of updated advice on the valuation and validation factors used in the project appraisal process for reviewing the individual merits of schemes under consideration or in progress.

The Agency must always be in a position to demonstrate that its programmes deliver the outcomes expected of it under the Government's 10 Year Plan for Transport and other Ministerial commitments. All local network management schemes must be assessed at key event stages and remain in competition regionally, relating to their first year rate of return i.e. the cost of accidents saved against the money spent. This is what we mean by the project appraisal process. This process allows the benefits to be assessed against all of the Government's five objectives for transport (environment, safety, economy, accessibility and integration). While at least six of the seven schemes show a beneficial rating when assessed against objectives of 'safety' and 'accessibility', a neutral score is shown against 'economy' and 'integration'. Furthermore, as indicated in the published Environmental Impact Statement, all seven schemes score less favourably when measured against some of the environmental sub-group headings i.e. those dealing with landscape and biodiversity.

Because of the relatively low number of accidents at the A14 sites (some of which, I'm pleased to say, have very few or no accidents), these proposals struggle to compete with others where there is a higher accident record and/or a lower cost solution in prospect. As a consequence of this, it is currently difficult to justify funding for the Thrapston to Brampton Improvement Scheme. The present scheme, as published, envisages grade separated (two-level) junctions with full connections to the trunk road at 4 locations and overbridges, without direct connections to the trunk road, at 3 locations. The overall cost, including land acquisition, is currently estimated at £25.4m.

The Agency has a Business Plan commitment to contribute to the 10 Year Plan target for a one third reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured on the strategic road network and a 10% reduction in the slight casualty rate by 2010. The Agency's contribution to these outcomes has been translated into requiring savings of at least 350 accidents per annum. The project appraisal process ensures that the most pressing accident reduction schemes are afforded the highest priority.

We must also consider the wider development needs of the route so that all actions, wherever possible, are fully coordinated. As you know, Ministers have recently endorsed many of the recommendations set out in the London to South Midlands Multi Modal Study. This Study was set up to examine the future transport needs over a study area which encompasses major north-south arterial road and rail routes from London to the Midlands together with important east-west corridors. The study has developed a set of recommendations for implementation over the short, medium and longer term, up to 2031. The Secretary of State's response, conveyed in a letter from Tony McNulty to the East of England Assembly on 9 July 2003, focuses mainly on the short to medium term measures for implementation over the next decade or so. In this correspondence, the Secretary of State makes clear his view that those recommendations for widening of the A14 to dual-3 lanes between M1 and A11 should be for the longer term i.e. for delivery beyond 2015. The validity of need for major improvements along this length of A14 to meet these wider objectives has not been questioned but the key question is one of timing.

We are currently investigating what sources of funding may be used to progress the A14 improvements between Thrapston and Brampton. We shall also look to see whether there are any less costly alternatives which could be justified in the intervening period.

I realise that this letter does not address some of the more detailed questions raised in your letter but I feel that these will best be answered once we know more about the progress on the schemes. In the meantime, I am happy to meet with you if you think it would be helpful.

Yours sincerely



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